

WELCOMING REMARKS – 12/17/2003 1:20 PM

**Mayor Alex Penelas
Universal Pre-K Conference II
Disney World's Contemporary Resort, Orlando, FL
Thursday, December 4, 2003**

- Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor to welcome you to the Second Universal Pre-Kindergarten Conference.
- I am surrounded in this room by people who share one important quality with each other. We care for children and are concerned about their future.
- With my co-host David Lawrence -- whose zeal for children is legendary -- I want to welcome and thank some very important participants:
 - Lt. Governor Toni Jennings;
 - Mayor Buddy Dyer;
 - Philip Handy, chair of the Florida Board of Education;
 - Amy Wilkins, executive director of the Trust for Early Education;
 - Roy Miller, president of the Florida Children's Campaign; and
 - Phyllis Kalifeh, president and CEO of the Florida Children's Forum.
- I also want to thank our conference partners for all their help:
 - Kaplan Early Education Corporation
 - Beowulf Publications; and
 - All the workshop facilitators and aids
 - And especially Erica McKinney
- I am also happy to recognize -- from Miami-Dade County:
 - Jennifer Bonnet (**BO-nay**), director of Our Little Ones Preschool & Day Care; and
 - Guillermo Permoy, director of the Second House Day Care Center
- Jennifer and Guillermo achieved Accreditation through a Miami-Dade United Way program; and in celebration of this we flew them here to attend our conference --- and visit Disney World. Congratulations, Jennifer and Guillermo.
- Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to take the next steps to make Universal Pre-Kindergarten a reality in our state by 2005 or sooner.
- At the end of this conference we will have framed recommendations that we hope will be accepted by the State Legislature next session as they work to implement the will of the people of Florida.
- "The Next Steps" is a fitting title for today's conference.

- Actually, it reminds me of the sign at the edge of a canyon in Arizona that says: Watch that next step. It's a doozy.
- Well, ladies and gentlemen. It has been a grand fight so far – with many victories. But watch these next steps. They are doozies.
- All of you in this room in one fashion or another have been part of this important initiative.
- Many of you were participants of the Mayor's Children Summit in 1999 when you clearly said to me that without Universal Pre-Kindergarten we were depriving many children in the State of a level playing field.
- Many of you helped lobby the legislature for three consecutive years on the merits of a quality early education program. Unfortunately, without success.
- Many of you were part of our focus groups early last year that helped craft the language for the Constitutional Amendment.
- Many of you were on the road for six months – talking to hundreds of thousands of Florida residents to gather signatures for our Pre-K petition.
- You were there with us as we petitioned the Supreme Court for approval of our ballot language..
- And you were there as we campaigned throughout the State to educate voters.
 - Almost 3 million Florida voters approved this momentous change in the State Constitution. That's 59.2 percent of the State electorate.
- What the voters said was simple: Children in Florida have the right – by law – to a quality Universal Pre-Kindergarten education.
 - Regardless of economic, social or demographic status
 - Regardless of where they live or how they live
- Just like we did last year after that great victory, I thought it was important to bring you back together. As the main stakeholders of this initiative, it is you who should guide us on the proper method of implementation.
- In essence, we are here today to finish the job we began at the first Mayor's Children's Summit four years ago.